DATING VIOLENCE IN ADOLESCENCE
REPORT ON FOCUS GROUPS
WITH HAMILTON YOUTH

Prepared for: Social and Public Health Services, City of Hamilton
Dating Violence Education Coordinating Group

Prepared by: Deirdre Pike, Social Planner Assistant
Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton

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Social Planning & Research Council
SPRC
of Hamilton-Wentworth

The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth
255 West Ave. North Hamilton ON L8L 5C8
website: www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca
phone: 905-522-1148 fax: 905-522-9124 email: sprc@sprc.hamilton.on.ca

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Members:

Sexual Assault Centre
Hamilton Police Services
Centre de Sante Communautaire Hamilton/Niagara
Social and Public Health Services - City of Hamilton
Alternatives for Youth
Transitional Youth
Family Services of Hamilton

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Dating violence is a social issue that impacts the health and well being of adolescents in our community. Health Canada defines dating violence as "any intentional sexual, physical or psychological attack on one partner by the other in a dating relationship". This definition reflects the belief that all forms of abuse are harmful and worth taking seriously.

Recently there has been an increase in the studies on the topic of dating violence and all conclusions point to the reality that dating violence is a serious problem in Canada. For example, one study of high school students who were dating reported that 21% of the females had experienced physical violence and 23% sexual violence in a dating relationship. Figures for male students were lower at 7% and 3%. Health Canada reports that between 16% and 25% of women surveyed say they have experienced at least one physical assault by a male dating partner.

In response to the seriousness of this issue, the Dating Violence Education Coordinating Group formed and met regularly in this past year to examine dating violence prevention services and programs in Hamilton. The group was comprised of members from local community agencies, health care, education and law enforcement.

The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC), in partnership with the Social and Public Health Services of the City of Hamilton, engaged in a consultation process aimed at understanding dating violence from a youth perspective. This report is based on findings and information gathered through a series of eleven focus groups with local youth.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative methodology in the form of focus groups. Open-ended questions were used in order to allow the youth to define and discuss the issues that were most prevalent for them.

The questions were used as they appear here. Throughout the report it is noted if additional questioning or prompting was utilized to elicit further information. The material here will be used to formulate questionnaires that are more specific with a direction to creating a curriculum for school and adolescent group use. Therefore, it was deemed essential to allow the youth to speak about what was clearly within their knowledge base and comfort level regarding dating violence. In this way, strengths and gaps in their knowledge become clear.

From December 5, 2001 to January 18, 2002, eleven focus groups were conducted with local youth in Hamilton to gain a fuller understanding of their knowledge and views of dating violence.

Adolescents from the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud, Conseil scolaire de district du Centre-Sud-Ouest, and the Transitional Youth Centre took part in this study. The students came from Barton Secondary School, Ancaster High Secondary School, Waterdown Secondary School, Delta Secondary School, École secondaire Georges-P. Vanier and Académie Catholique Mère-Teresa. The Francophone youth met at Centre de Santé Communautaire.

The range in age of students was thirteen to nineteen years with grades nine to O.A.C. represented. Each group had between six and twelve participants, with approximately 85 participating in total. A total of six (6) male groups and five (5) female groups were conducted. Each group lasted an average of twenty (20) to thirty (30) minutes.

All groups were facilitated by an SPRC staff member, except the female groups at Transitional Youth and Centre de Santé Communautaire which were facilitated by staff members from those respective centres. In each group, a public health nurse or community worker associated with the specific centre recorded the notes by hand. A tape recorder was also used to ensure accurate transcription of the consultations. Youth were informed of the tape recorder and consent was given for its use.

Four questions were posed to each group. The questions or prompts that follow in brackets were only used if the conversation needed direction.

They were:

1. Dating violence is a general term that means different things to different people. What does the term "dating violence" mean to you?

2. How would you know if a friend or classmate were involved in a violent relationship? (Are there signs that might tell you that someone is in a violent relationship? Behavior; changes in other relationships; physical signs)

3. How could someone avoid becoming involved in a violent relationship? (Are there signs that a relationship is or may become violent?)

4. What would be the best way to educate students about dating violence? (Who? teachers, public health nurses, other students; what ages?; mixed gender groups?)

3.0 FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

3.1 Question One

Dating violence is a general term that means different things to different people. What does the term "dating violence" mean to you?

3.1.1 Direction of the Violence

In discussions about the definition of dating violence, it became clear from the outset through the use of gender language that respondents were speaking mainly of male-to-female violence.

However, sometimes a participant brought up the idea on her or his own that this type of violence can go "both ways" and an extensive group conversation followed. Other times if it wasn't mentioned, the facilitator asked for clarification as to whether this was always male-to-female violence. Again, the group easily entered a discussion about the incidents of female-to-male violence. Participants never mentioned the issue of same-sex dating violence.

In all, at least thirty-seven (37) times female-to-male violence was talked about but a clear majority of this discussion took place in the male focus groups.

3.1.2 Types Of Abuse

3.1.3 Psychological/Emotional Abuse

By far the most commonly identified forms of dating violence came under the category of Emotional and Psychological Abuse. Examples of violence under this category were named at least sixty-four (64) times. Within this category, there seemed to be three (3) subcategories directly named by the participants: Controlling Behaviour, Verbal Abuse and Emotional Abuse. The themes that emerged in the discussions correspond to the themes commonly used in current literature on dating violence.

Controlling Behaviour

The word "controlling" was commonly used in each of the eleven (11) groups, with every group but one mentioning it at least twice. Overall, there were at least twenty-four (24) comments made that were specifically about controlling behavior.
This aspect of dating violence was reflected in statements such as, "You're not your own self anymore. They make decisions for you." Similar comments were made by other participants: "they tell you what friends to hang out with, when and where to go," and "you

can't wear what you want or talk to whoever you want." Others named "monitoring phone calls, friends and clothes" as related to this aspect of dating violence.

Jealousy was identified as a major reason for the controlling behaviour. In particular, many females made statements like males "don't want anyone else to look at you so they control where you go and what you eat and say no makeup." Another issue identified was "not being able to wear the clothes you want because they think you're doing it to make other guys jealous."

In the male groups some of the comments were: "girls make you do everything" and "they control you by turning friends against you or saying 'you're not going out with these guys.'" Male respondents also spoke repetitively of being "manipulated."

Although both females and males identified controlling behaviour, it was discussed more extensively and seen as the main focus of dating violence in the female focus groups.

Verbal Abuse

The topic of verbal abuse was equally common in both female and male groups with participants reporting this kind of violence in the form of either "threats" or "put downs". Verbal abuse was named specifically or by example a minimum of twenty-three (23) times.

Some participants spoke of "swearing and cussing", and "raising your voice". One spoke about "putting the other person down, telling them they're ugly and not worth anything - constantly, not just once." The repetitive nature of verbal abuse was mentioned by another participant who said, "verbal abuse is yelling threats and constant degrading". Name-calling was also discussed with different examples offered.

When males spoke about violence directed toward their gender they said it was "more verbal than physical when it's female to male." It was also reiterated that "name calling can work both ways - she calls him names and puts him down." Participants in one group agreed when it was stated that, "more males do it physically while more females do it verbally".

Emotional Abuse

Reported by seventeen (17) participants, emotional abuse was generally identified as when a victims' "self-esteem gets brought down". Not being "appreciated", a "lack of respect", "taking advantage of a person who trusted you" and "making you feel that you're going down without them" were other expressions used in this category.

When males spoke of emotional abuse perpetrated toward them by females they reported "it happens a lot that the guy gets beat up - it doesn't really hurt physically but your pride goes down." It was also reported that with female-to-male violence it is "more emotional."

3.1.4 Physical Abuse

Incidents or examples of physical violence were mentioned a minimum of twenty-five (25) times by all participants. Broad statements such as "any unwanted physical contact" to specific actions of "hitting" and "backhands" were identified. Other specific actions included pushing, smacking, stabbing, hitting, shoved against a wall, kicking and being thrown onto the floor.

One respondent noted, "they'll hit you or push you and then say, "I'm sorry but you brought it on yourself, apologizing over and over".

The physical definition of dating violence extended into discussions around female-to-male aggression and included further examples such as girls who "may throw stuff at you", or "slap or shove."

3.1.5 Sexual Abuse

The least mentioned category in the definition of dating violence was that of sexual abuse with eleven (11) participants naming it as "unwanted sex" or "being forced into sex". The word rape was used three (3) times. Only once was a reference made to "the date rape drug."

"The main thing is sex - they want to do something and you pull away", was a comment made in a female group. Another female said dating violence is "being forced into sex - doing things you don't want to - feeling like you have to do it all the time."

Nine of the eleven references were made by the female participants. Sexual violence was named by only two male participants. Both times the reference came in part of a list of kinds of violence, once named as "sexual abuse" and once as "rape".

3.2 Question Two

How would you know if a friend or classmate were involved in a violent relationship? (Are there signs that might tell you that someone is in a violent relationship? Behavior; changes in other relationships; physical signs)

Discussions in response to this question always focussed on individuals as victims of dating as opposed to perpetrators. There was no movement to discuss how one might know if a person was the violent partner in a relationship.

3.2.1 Change in Behaviour

The majority of comments (forty-three) in reference to knowing if a friend or classmate were involved in a violent relationship fell into the category of noting a change in behaviour.

The most frequently sited change pertained to increased isolation. Comments such as, "can't see friends anymore" and "always with her boyfriend" were often made. One person stated that people experiencing violence "neglected friends" and "were more closed off." It was also noted by some that "girls forget about their whole life except for the guy."

Another area of noticeable change in behaviour was in school. Comments such as "marks may start to slide" and students "not doing well in school" were made by a number of respondents.

"Flinching" and "acting anxious" were behaviours that some participants indicated as common among those who were victims of dating violence. Other emotional evidence of violence was named as "being stressed out or upset all the time."

One comment pertained to female to male violence: "guys will fight other guys more if they're being beat up by a girl".

3.2.2 Change in Personality

Thirty-five (35) responses pertained to seeing changes in the personalities of individuals experiencing dating violence. The most prevalent term associated with this reality was depression. Many of the participants noted behaviour that was withdrawn, sad, upset and low in self-esteem. Some respondents noted it was easier for peers to see the change in people who were previously "happy-go-lucky" or "cheery and now are sad".

3.2.3 Change in Appearance

"Bruises and cuts", and "marks and contusions" were identified as the obvious changes in appearance that occurred as a result of dating violence. "Showing up with bruises and saying stupid things like I walked into the door" was also noted in this category. Changing one's appearance to mask the effects of violence was also described as in "covering with make up or sunglasses" or "wearing baggy clothes and not caring about your appearance." The amount of discussion (eighteen (18) references) in this category correlates to the amount of discussion on physical abuse being part of the definition of dating violence.

3.2.4 Witnessing Violence or First-hand Accounts

Seven (7) mentions were made of either actually "seeing him pound on her" or "hearing it in confidence." There was some consensus that "eventually they'll (the victim) come out and say something because the threat's too much for them."

3.3 Question Three

How could someone avoid becoming involved in a violent relationship? (Are there signs that a relationship is or may become violent?)

3.3.1 Knowing the Person

"Making sure you know the person before you actually go out with them" was the most typical, yet general, response for this question. More specifically there were suggestions that "you should hang out in a group" at first or spend time "one-on-one in a public place." These were seen as safer alternatives before going out alone on a date.

Other ways of getting to know someone in order to avoid becoming involved in a violent relationship were also connected to getting to know a person first. "Talking to others who know them" was seen by some as a possibility. "Talk to friends and ex-girl or boy-friends" or "asking people who know them what they're like" were suggested. However, in three groups, these suggestions were widely debated as inappropriate and referred to once as "spying."

Another possibility of gaining further knowledge about a person was observing their behaviour. In fact, this was mentioned at least twenty-six (26) times. "See how he acts around friends and family" was a common theme. Avoiding people who fight or who have an "attitude" was also suggested. Watching for the more "aggressive type" and also watching for drug and alcohol use were named as ways to indicate that violence could become a problem in a relationship. Each of these latter comments was made only twice in all the groups.

3.3.2 Self Awareness/Esteem

The importance of self-awareness was brought up in relation to avoiding violent dating situations with remarks made such as "having self esteem" and "being strong is important". "Saying no when you want to" and "always standing up for yourself" are other examples of the types of comments made in response to this question. "Respect yourself and then you respect yourself to not get into that" was a summary comment made by one participant.

The necessity of "knowing where to get help", and "knowing available resources" was noted. One participant named the "kids help phone" as a resource.

There was also a significant number of participants who felt that there were "no warning signs" to indicate potential violence or abuse in a relationship. Both of the groups that answered in this way were male groups. Comments such as "you can't tell what a person's thinking" and "the way they act at home is different than in public" indicated that some young people did not see ways of safeguarding against choosing violent partners.

3.4 QUESTION FOUR

What would be the best way to educate students about dating violence? (who?: teachers, public health nurses, other students; what ages?; mixed gender groups?)

3.4.1 When to Begin

The majority of participants indicated that getting the information about dating violence before high school was essential. Thirteen (13) participants said grades six to eight was the best time to start teaching about this topic while only four (4) said waiting until high school would be an option. The clearest remark about this was, "lots of girls went through a lot [of dating violence] in grade nine but it was too late because they didn't know about it."

Two (2) participants suggested starting as early as kindergarten. One (1) person used a program called "Bad Touch" as an example of how to show young children early on what is safe in relationships.

Other suggestions about the age of participants getting information on dating violence made note of having "different age groups" involved." "Mixing grades might be good because younger guys can get things out of older guys. You'd get more mature answers from older guys who would share their experience."

3.4.2 Approaches

Classroom discussions were the most common approach suggested by participants. One person said there should be "more discussions in class not just, 'don't let someone do that.'" "The smaller the group the better" was another response. "An informal group discussion with pizza is a good way to meet about it," said another respondent.

An equal number of participants eight (8) named the most appropriate leaders of these discussions to be either a guest speaker or a peer. The best guest speaker was said to be someone "who experienced it already" and who can "tell us how it starts off." Age was mentioned more than once as a factor in considering a good guest speaker, with definite clarity that one should be "close to the classes' age." One of the male participants noted the need for "guest speakers for the guys too".

With regard to peer leadership, many participants agreed upon "youth talking to youth about dating violence", while a few did not want "teens" unless "they're serious and they've overcome the situation either as an offender or someone who was abused." Another idea expressed was to engage "teams of students especially if someone had experienced it." The most important factor seemed to be that whoever led the discussion should have experienced Dating Violence and would be close to the age of the participants. One person also mentioned not using "stats and information" but said it would be "easier if people come in and just start talking about it."

Using various media in the form of teen magazines, television movies and public advertising was suggested often. Also identified as a way of getting information on dating violence was "more information in the schools: campaigns, conferences, or a symposium." A television show called "You, Me and the Kids" was named as one dealing with "lots of good issues with counsellors on it." The possibility of a public campaign with the topic, "Take Pride in Yourself" was suggested.

When prompted in one group about use of the Internet as a way of getting the information across, a lone participant simply said, "Yes, it could be good".

3.4.3 Gender of Group Participants

Having groups with both female and male participants was reported as positive because "it's good to get different opinions from both sides."
One student reported, "We don't know what the guys talk about or what they learn. We learn about them hitting us but we don't hear what they learn. You need both sides of the story."

There was agreement however that younger students were not as comfortable with mixed gender groups. So while at least eight (8) references were made to mixed groups there were six (6) suggestions to have a combination approach. "If teaching it, have both male and female but if it's a discussion, divide the group."

There were five comments that separate groups "would be best." One participant remarked, "not a co-ed environment" while another noted, "there is too much contradiction between guys and girls."

4.0 KEY FINDINGS

Not surprisingly, both strengths and gaps in the youths' knowledge base about dating violence were identified through these focus groups.

A clear understanding was expressed regarding psychological and emotional abuse as a common part of dating violence. Control or balance of power in a relationship was easily identified and discussed as violence. However, this was done almost to the point of downplaying or excluding both physical and sexual violence.

Although the majority of the conversations focussed on males directing violence toward females, a portion of the discussion concentrated on females directing forms of dating violence toward males. However, while dating violence toward females was comprised of all three categories of abuse, the violence named toward males seemed to be experienced largely in the form of verbal and emotional abuse. It is important to note that most of the exchange about female-to-male violence took place in the male groups.

There was a distinct lack of conversation about same sex relationships. This was not included as a separate question or prompted by the facilitator.

There seemed to be a good understanding of the identifying signs noticed from those involved in violent relationships. However, there did not seem to be as much evidence that one would be able to observe appropriate and inappropriate behaviour of others in terms of choosing a safe partner.

Having a strong sense of self and high self-esteem was identified as one of the best ways of avoiding a violent dating relationship. For some, there was an awareness of the importance to start building ones self-esteem at a very young age.

In considering a good age to begin teaching about dating violence there was almost consensus from the respondents that it needs to begin at about age eleven or twelve (11 or 12). This would correspond with grades six or seven (6 or 7). Separating genders at that time would be favourable while moving into high school there would be more agreement to having mixed gender groups.

An equal number of participants spoke positively about either peer led discussions or bringing in guest speakers with relevant experience and appropriate age for the students' comfort level. Health class was seen as most suitable place for discussion.

Use of traditional media (television, magazines, posters) would bring community awareness to the issue of dating violence although the internet did not garner much attention in the discussions.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

These focus groups were helpful in understanding dating violence from a youth perspective, including their capacities and gaps in comprehending the issues. However, the information is limited and further research needs to take place. For both future research (e.g. Direction of survey questions or format of focus groups) and further discussions with youth about this topic, there are a number of recommendations to consider.

1. While there is an understanding of the three (3) categories of dating violence, there was an obvious emphasis on the psychological/emotional component and much less discussion about physical and particularly sexual abuse. This could indicate a lack of knowledge, a lack of comfort in talking about other kinds of abuse or a combination of both. Therefore, any discussions about dating violence with youth should include a definition of dating violence that names the full range of categories of abuse.

2. Helping youth to name the full spectrum of relationships that can experience some form of dating violence is essential. While there was an understanding that females and males can both be victims of dating violence, there was no move toward expanding the definition of dating outside of a heterosexual experience. Therefore, future discussions and research gathering should include references to same sex couples.

3. From the discussions on how to recognize whether a person is involved in a violent relationship, it has been noted that approaches to helping someone in that situation were not discussed. However, this would be an essential element to curriculum considerations or other types of youth discussions on this topic.

4. While there was clarity around knowing if one were in a violent relationship, there was a lack of awareness for some regarding the clues to recognizing potentially violent partners. Current research indicates that one can never be positive about a future partner, but at the same time it is important to continue to bring characteristics and actions to light that tend to be associated with violence.

5. Many strides have been made in trying to teach young people self-respect and the importance of having a strong sense of self or self-esteem. This was recognized by the participants as one of the most important defenses for avoiding violent relationships and should continue to be talked about at an early age.

6. From the findings of these focus groups, it is recommended that discussions about dating violence begin by grade 6 but with gender exclusive groups. However, by grade 8 or 9 at the latest these groups should be mixed in gender. Participants made it clear they wanted to know what the opposite gender was learning. This may counteract some of the tendency to place blame on the opposite gender for violence in relationships.

7. Discussions led by peers or guest speakers with relevant experience will be best received by youth. Age was emphasized repeatedly as something that did matter in this

discussion so any speakers being considered should be as close to high school age as possible.

8. Following group discussions, the next best place to get information for this age of youth was identified as television. Therefore, if guest speakers were not available in some areas, appropriate television shows may be used as an alternative to beginning a discussion. It is also recommended that a further discussion about the usefulness of resources on the Internet would be worthwhile.

9. Finally, some participants mentioned follow up in terms of getting help if one were to become involved in a violent dating relationship. Since only youth mentioned a particular place ("kids help phone") it is recommended that any discussions that take place with youth on this topic involve an available list of community resources. (Note: Such a list was taken to each of the focus groups.)

6.0 CONCLUSION

The findings of these focus groups form the beginning of a collection of research on the issue of dating violence among youth in our community. A further project will now be developed to identify, adapt and disseminate a "Best Practices Program" to individuals and groups in order to coordinate strategies that will prevent the incidence of dating violence among adolescents in our community.

The next step in this process will be to develop a questionnaire to be administered to adolescents living in Hamilton in order to determine the incidence of dating violence. Through this step, input will be gathered on the structure, content and delivery of programs and services concerning dating violence.

This information will then be disseminated to key service providers within Hamilton in order to improve efficacy and co-ordination of prevention services.

The findings will also be shared with other communities through web-site postings and other printed material.

7.0 REFERENCES

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APPENDIX

DATING VIOLENCE AMONG YOUTH
FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

Dating violence is a general term that means different things to different people. What does the term "dating violence" mean to you?

Physical (25)

- physical abuse
- maybe even physical violence
- physical
- being hit
- any unwanted physical contact
- pushing
- getting into an argument and ending up grabbing or slapping out of anger
- physical abuse while dating
- hitting, slapping
- physical
- emotional
- they'll hit you or push you and then say, "I'm sorry" but you brought it on yourself, apologize over and over
- anything that's not playfighting
- smacking - hitting of any kind
- physical
- stabbing
- physical
- any unwanted physical contact
- violent aggression - grabbing their arm
- when you get hit by your girlfriend or boyfriend
- hitting
- beating while dating
- hitting them, backhand
- when your boyfriend hits you
- basically physical abuse - hit, shoved against a wall, kick you, throw you on the floor

Verbal (23)

- words that bring you down
- "when your partner or your girlfriend and you argue a lot"
- talking down to people, saying things you didn't mean - you could have walked away at the times
- treating them badly, bringing up the past, saying someone looks fat
- swearing, cussing, words that have no meaning to them - just used to hurt
- verbal abuse while dating
- calling your girlfriend a whore
- threatening, making fun
- put downs
- "You are nothing without me"
- verbal - raising your voice is just as threatening
- name calling - "stupid", "retard"
- verbal abuse
- criticizing
- verbal abuse - yelling, threats, constant degrading
- putting people down
- can be verbal
- putting the other person down, telling them they're ugly and not worth anything constantly - not just once
- verbal
- swearing
- name calling - tell you you're ugly
- talk wrong about your family
- putting them down

Emotional (17 times)

- emotional not being a big deal unless people take it seriously
- taking advantage of a person who trusted you
- make you feel that you're going down without them
- self-esteem gets brought down so they take them back
- lack of respect
- mental and emotional abuse
- taking advantage of you – hurting feelings
- saying "I love you" and not showing it
- emotional violence – name calling, not appreciating them as a person
- emotional – don't have to say or do anything – get them fired from their job to keep them in place
- anything that makes the other person feel uncomfortable
- emotional abuse
- can also be mentally abused
- emotional
- your self-esteem goes down
- emotional abuse
- when your boyfriend doesn't trust you

Sexual (11)

- when you force your spouse or mate or whatever you want to call them to do something they don't want to with physical action – kicking, punching
- sexual
- unwanted sex
- the main thing is sex – they want to do something and you pull away
- the guy wants you to get drunk and then it becomes a violent situation
- rape
- taking off of clothes
- being forced into sex – doing things you don't want to – feeling like you have to do it all the time
- rape
- sexually abused
- lead to rape

Controlling Behaviour (24)

- when your boyfriend questions everything you do
- when your boyfriend forces you to do stuff you don't want to do
- the control that a person has over an other
- not being allowed to wear certain clothes
- having to be covered from head to toe
- not allowed to hang around good friends
- not being independent
- anything enforced to do something against their will
- when you can't wear what you want or talk to whoever you want
- someone controlling you and what you want to do
- don't want anyone else to look at you – they own you so they control where you go and what you eat and no makeup
- "don't eat that chocolate bar because it will make you fat and no one else will want you and you'll look ugly"
- monitoring phone calls, friends and clothes
- being obsessive
- not letting them go somewhere with their friends
- controlling leads to violence – neither one gets exactly what they want
- keeping them in their place
- not your own self any more – controlling – they make decisions for you

- told what friends to hang out with, when and where to go
- smoking - a lot of people don't like it
- making you wear push-up bras - or not being able to wear the clothes you want because they think you're doing it to make other guys jealous
- controlling - tell you who to go out with, who to talk to, not let you go out and make you stay with them at all times or follow you, question you, drive you everywhere so they know where you are, want you to call them
- hard to leave them, they take all your rights away and your freedom
- it's like you left them but they don't want to let you go and even if you try to move on they're always there trying to control you

Female-directed vs. Male-directed (37)

- goes both ways - guys and girls
- lots of girls get away with it while guys go to jail
- not physical for female to male unless it was a really nice guy who never hit back
- he might care about her and love her so he won't hit her
- more emotional
- hard for a guy if a girlfriend beats him up - can't talk to friends
- girls make you do everything - manipulating you into buying things
- girls are smart about it and we're stupid about it - buying things
- girls may throw stuff at you or start yelling at you
- control you by turning friends against you or saying "you're not going out with these guys"
- more males do it physically - more females to it verbally
- females talk a lot which makes you get violent - they try to make you jealous and test you or say things to piss you off
- threats, what they lack in themselves - they always want, want, want - never satisfied with good - have to get great
- they have low self esteem
- they don't stay on the topic of what they're arguing about and they bring things up from the past - if you make a good point they don't want to admit it so they go to their next point right away
- act jealous and mad so they don't go anywhere - brings controlling
- girls always lie - you ask if they're mad and they say no but you know they are - girls suck
- mostly girls beat up guys because the guy can't really fight back
- happens a lot that the guy gets beat up - doesn't really hurt physically but your pride goes down - guys standing with friends and a girl will come and kick you but you can't kick back - you just have to take it - girls take advantage of you knowing that you can't hit them back
- violence can be both ways- a lot of males get beat up by their girlfriends
- women can overpower men - "seen my sister beat up her boyfriend"
- girls control guys too
- lower percentage of girls beating up on men
- girls make more fun of guys - they gossip a lot and they hear stories and tell it to your face and it might hurt you
- a lot easier for a girl to beat up a guy in a public place

- girls are really jealous and get more verbally abusive
- they put them down with their mouths, weaken their mental states or slap or shove
- harder for guys to tell they were being abused – they wouldn't admit it
- girls can also be very controlling
- if a guy wants to go out with his friends she pushes him and says, "You're not going – I don't want you to."
- name calling can work both ways – she calls him names and puts him down
- physically happens by girls to guys too
- not always guys hitting girls
- guys have to take it because they can't hit back but girls can
- some guys are 'whips' – they buy everything the girl wants instead of thinking of their own happiness
- more verbal than physical when it's female to male
- need to be told that women can be abusive toward male partner too

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General (13)

- anything hurtful that she or he doesn't want you to do
- anything that doesn't feel good that's not consenting
- one partner is abusive to another
- any abuse
- any form of violence in a relationship not necessarily on a date but more than just friends
- doing things out of anger
- anything that shows anger toward the other person
- drug-related – put something in someone's drink
- general abuse
- unwanted actions
- forced to do something you don't want to do
- anything not morally acceptable – just treat them with respect
- abuse children of the relationship

How would you know if a friend or classmate were involved in a violent relationship? (Are there signs that might tell you that someone is in a violent relationship? Behavior; changes in other relationships; physical signs)

Change in Appearance (18)

- wounds on her body
- marks, contusions
- bruising, cuts
- looking in his or her eyes
- bruises
- cover up with makeup or glasses
- not smiling
- losing weight, change of hair colour, marks on skin
- they look tired like not getting enough sleep
- sunglasses, baggy clothes, no make up, they don't care about appearance
- change of clothing – longer sleeves
- black and blue
- emotional scarring – facial tick – "a black eye for the mind"
- marks on a girl
- change in clothing – tight fitting clothes before and now loose fitting cover up more – covering marks
- arm marks around biceps area where they grab you
- bruises

- show up with bruises and marks all the time but they don't explain how it happened - say stupid things like "I walked into a door"

Change in Behaviour (43)

- defends her boyfriend
- marks may start to slide - not show up to class all the time
- can't see friends anymore
- flinching, cowering
- mention something about the relationship and she cries
- change of lifestyle
- jumpy around opposite sex
- talking differently, maybe more like the violent partner
- they flinch when you try to pat them on the back
- stressed out or upset all the time
- always with their boyfriend
- they get so into the relationship that they can't be with their friends and they quit sports team
- they stop talking to guys because their boyfriend thinks they're hitting on guys but just friends
- flinching
- forget about whole life except for the guy
- change in behaviour with boyfriend
- unmotivated
- trying to get away from their partner
- don't want to go home
- isolated
- if she stops coming out - lots of excuses - catch her in lies - making things up
- says he won't let her go out
- aggressor's name comes up and you can tell the person feels tense and uneasy
- act anxious and paranoid
- not doing well in school
- always with that one person - friends neglected - isolation
- change in behaviour - attitude changes - more closed off
- make excuses why they can't go out
- grades start dropping drastically
- changes in relationships - friends and family
- changes in the way they act around people - shy away from guys
- get intimidated by guys - start moving away from you
- guys will fight other guys more if they're being beat up by a girl
- they (guys) would mostly laugh it off
- interaction in public
- "I gotta get back to her before she gets mad"
- controlling in public
- the way they talk in public - one person may put down the other person and the way the person reacts to it, if they put their head down or don't try to defend themselves because they know what's going to happen
- they used to be able to go out but now they always make excuses
- call themselves names cause that's what they heard from their boyfriend like they've come to believe that's right
- eating habits change - not want to eat
- scared of doing stuff, activities
- can be aggressive towards someone else

Change in Personality (35)

- emotional distress, always upset
- won't like to talk out – getting emotional and crying
- change in one of their personalities – either girl or guy
- used to be cheery and now sad
- someone who used to talk all the time is more quiet
- keeping to themselves
- someone who used lead is now a follower
- not happy
- different self-esteem – think low of themselves all the time
- not able to accept compliments because their self-esteem is shot down so much
- making fun of themselves
- depression
- depression
- they get mad if you ask about the relationship
- they get really quiet, isolated
- over embellishing things – act happy all the time saying everything is great
- anti-social
- depressed
- won't open up to you
- feels isolated
- is sad
- paranoid/fear; nervous, threats,
- low self esteem
- depressed
- quiet, being controlled
- depressed/unhappy
- can't talk to them – get really snotty
- get really shy
- overall moody
- they'd be upset and touchy – get emotional about it
- quiet – they don't want to talk all the time
- you say something and they say "ok" and back off and accept it
- depressed and withdrawn with their friends – kind of drift away
- attitudes change – before they were "happy-go-lucky" and then they become depressed and don't talk as much
- they can become abusive themselves if they're being abused

Hearing about it or Seeing it (7)

- witnessing it
- seeing him "pound on her"
- hearing it in confidence
- seeing it for yourself, witness it
- hear it from them or stories from someone else about what might be happening
- eventually they'll come out and say something because the threat's too much for them or they won't say anything because they're afraid of the consequences
- they might just tell you if they're good friends

How could someone avoid becoming involved in a violent relationship? (Are there signs that a relationship is or may become violent?)

Get to know them (17)

- get to know the person you date before you date him
- make sure you know the person before you actually go out with them
- go with people a couple of times and make friends with them first
- don't get too serious for the first little while
- avoid people with violent past – people who fight a lot
- make sure you know the person – be friends for a while
- one-on-one talks in public places
- know the person well before you go out with them
- be friends first
- hang out as a group – double dates
- talk to them a lot and you can figure it out – just ask them about themselves
- hang out in a group setting for the first while and if you really like them then you can go out one on one
- don't rush things - get to know somebody
- communication ahead of time will help you know them
- find out about the person before you go out with them
- spend more time with them before you say you'll go out with them
- being friends in groups so you can be protected if something happens and it's not just you

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Talk to others about them (13)

- ask old boyfriend what she was like – is she a nice person, did she cheat
- get your friends to meet him too
- talk to his friends and ex-girlfriends
- find out about the person – ask friend
- find out about past relationships and see what went wrong
- talk to friends who know them
- weird if someone started investigating your past – other ways to know the person better
- listen to friends' comments
- take your friends' advice no matter how badly you don't want to
- your friends see it from a different position
- ask people who know them what they're like – ask past girlfriends
- start asking about personal life – family, divorce
- get opinion from your family

Observe Behaviour (26)

- when you see that someone does something that scares you, don't go out with him
- the way they react if you touch them on the shoulder and they snap – if they act aggressively
- maybe see if this is happening at home – it reflects at school
- low tolerance, enjoy arguing, always having to win argument
- unclear communication
- see how he acts around friends and family
- if a man doesn't treat his mother properly he won't treat his girlfriend properly
- see how he treats his mom or sisters
- if there's a lot of anger
- watch people and how they act with their friends
- hot tempers, jealousy
- avoid controlling people, someone who fights, has "attitude", disrespectful
- if they frighten you at all even just joking around and they hit you too hard tell them and don't get involved
- tell by the guy – if they get angry easily, doing drugs and or drinking
- judge by their friends and who they hang out with – if their friends are jerks then they probably are too
- if they push you
- watch how they are around others
- how they talk about moms, sisters, ex-girlfriends
- the way they act toward you
- who they hang out with
- watch for drug and alcohol use
- when they're jealous all the time
- the more aggressive type – having a normal conversation and they get more upset for little reasons
- athletic types – more aggressive – competitive types that never want to lose at anything
- you can be at the house just hanging out and if they have siblings and they push them around or name calling or the way they talk to their parents
- major attitude change toward you if they nice before and they turn bad

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Self Awareness (8)

- can't do things you used to do
- schedule changes – everything you do revolves around the other person
- be strong and say no when you want to
- always stand up for yourself from the beginning or they'll prey on you
- be stern with your morals – don't let them change what you believe
- whoever your partner is you have to feel like you have control just not them having control – should be a mutual thing
- stand up for yourself
- have self-esteem

No warning signs (from two male groups) (13)

- you can't tell what a person's thinking so you can't tell
- people's private and public lives are completely different, therefore, you can't tell
- the way they act at home is different than in public
- you just see the results of the violence
- unless there are major signs you can't tell – if they have a record
- you can't find the right person by looking for facts and searching
- finding the right relationship just happens and it clicks - better than forcing yourself to go out with someone where you accept character flaws
- it always seems good when you just start dating but then you learn different things about them – after six months it's too late – you think "Man, I never knew this was going to happen or I wouldn't have started it"
- no signs they try to change you
- they want you to be there for them when they want you to be there
- they get together with you knowing you do certain things and then when you've been together they say "Hey, I don't want you to do that" and that starts arguments
- just make sure it's the right person you want to build a relationship with
- ask the girl too – it has to be mutually decided

Other Comments (19)

- respect yourself and then you respect yourself to not get into that
- television has a big effect on what kids do and how they act – now everyone wants to be in a gang
- there's no need for violence – always a way to work things out
- break up when you see things getting out of hand
- maybe see if this is happening at home – it reflects at school
- stereotype is a big guy against a small, quiet, shy girl
- don't see dating violence in Ancaster/Burlington
- don't think you can change anyone
- abuse can come out of being drunk or high but not all the time
- maybe appearance but not always big, buff guys
- look in their eyes
- if violence occurs more than once in the same relationship it's the victims fault for not avoiding the situation
- accidents do happen – not always the intention to harm – just a slap – apologize and move on
- if the bigger person can't take a little bit of violence leave the relationship
- if it happens in a remote area it could go too far
- know where to get help, know what's right and wrong – police then parents
- knowing available resource - call kid's help phone to get help
- need to recognize when a relationship is turning abusive – get out the first time
- don't hang around and wait for it to happen again

What would be the best way to educate students about dating violence? (who?: teachers, public health nurses, other students; what ages?; mixed gender groups?)

Age/grade level

Elementary School (13 - gr. 6-8; 2 - kindergarten)	Secondary School (4)
- relationships start gr. 6 - not serious yet though - should start learning information in grade 7 and 8 - age 12-13, gr. 7-8(2) - grades 6 -8 - it's too late by high school - lots of girls went through a lot in grade 9 but it was too late because they didn't know about it - when people are ready - puberty - grade 6 - 8 - grade 7/8 start dating - tell them when they're ready - maturity - now is too late - kids would be insulted if you try to tell them how to date - start in junior high - grade 7 - grade 6-8 is when kids start experimenting - they bring those drills into high school - you should start in grade six with separate groups - bring it in slowly over a period of time so it's there and you learn it a little at a time - "bad touch" kind of things are good when you're little - teaches you what's right and wrong early - built in early about right and wrong - start at age 5 or 6	- for all high school students - age 16, gr. 9, depending on maturity as early as possible - grade 9 and up (majority) - understand it more when you're older so grade 9 is better

Other

- different age groups
- mixing grades might be good because younger can get things out of older guys - more mature answers from older guys - share experience
- start teaching it when you start sex ed.
- everyone develops at different times
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Approaches

Use of various Media (8)

- teen magazines
- movie - "Fear"
- "You, me and the kids" - tv show deals with lots of good issues - has counselors on it
- movies, tv shows, parents
- use public advertising - tv, radio, billboards, posters
- talk shows
- media - television, magazines - "take pride in yourself" stuff
- more information in the schools: campaigns, conferences, symposiums

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Class discussion (9)

- informal group discussion with pizza is a good way to meet about it
- more discussions in class not just "don't let someone do that"
- smaller the group the better - more comfortable
- after school activities
- role playing
- in health and hygiene class
- don't cancel gym to do it - they'll be bitter already - make sure it's a good speaker - make it a special discussion even though it's health class have it at a special time
- health classes or leadership class in high school
- everybody should have it not just certain classes

Who should lead it

Guest speaker (8)

- guest speaker with experience
- phys. Ed. Class, with a guest speaker not gym teacher
- guest speaker - have someone who experienced it already
- have someone who has gone through it tell us how it starts off
- specialist - sex ed. teacher
- guest speakers who have gone through it is really effective
- need guest speakers for guys too
- good to get another person's point of view if they've had it happen to them - but a teacher needs to be there

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Peer leadership (8)

- youth talking to youth about dating violence
- people around facilitator's age - "not much older"
- teens only if they're serious and they've overcome the situation, either as offender or someone who was abused
- other teens should pass information on
- someone who experienced it, young, peers
- peer - older students should teach it - easier if people come in and just start talking about it - not stats and info
- teams of students would be good especially if someone had experienced it
- someone who has had the experience close to the person's age should lead the class

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Teacher (5)

- home room teacher
- teachers that you trust/respect
- if you bring it in gradually eventually you'll get a teacher you like that you'll listen to - has to be a teacher that treats you like people and doesn't look down to you - makes you comfortable
- it depends on the teacher and some will go in to it more
- maybe a principal because he can do something about it

Health/Phys. Ed. teacher (4)

- health teacher
- gym teacher
- health teacher - background of health is important
- gym teacher would be best or family studies class

Public Health nurse (3)

- public health nurse is good
- someone from community health centre
- public health nurse could teach it is she was around more

Guidance counsellor (3)

- counsellor
- guidance counselor
- counselor is best because used to talking to people - they actually care

what you're saying - if they talk to you about it you can approach a counselor a later date rather than a teacher you see everyday in class

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Parents (2)

- tell parents so that parents can tell you not to do it
- parents are the best people to teach it

General qualities (3)

- find someone with whom the students fell comfortable to give workshops
- someone you believe, respected in the community
- someone who's married

Who is not to be involved

- not a victim – she might cry
- not an elderly person
- no one opens up to teachers or guidance counselors – professional barrier
- better if it's not someone you see everyday
- don't put it in a class that not everyone takes because then not everyone will get it

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Gender mix

Mixed (8)

- mixed groups – comfortable with mixed – good to get different opinions from both sides
- should be co-ed or one on one
- when you're older it can be mixed because you learn more when you can have a conversation back and forth with some controversy to hear the other points of view
- we never get to hear what the guys think about – some guys might not know they're being jealous so it'd be good to do it together
- should be both sexes so you get more of an understanding how everyone's thinking – we never know what girls are thinking
- in high school you're more comfortable with the guys so then mixed
- we don't know what the guys talk about or what they learn – we learn about them hitting us but we don't hear about what they learn
- you need both sides of the story

Combination (6)

- teaching it, have both male and female but if it's discussion, divide group
- a mixture – one day together and next separated
- female to female when first learning but later having a male to female
- would be good to hear their point of view
- start off together and go off for separate discussions and questions
- co-ed class – start out separately and then together

Not Mixed (5)

- not a coed environment or it will become "battle of the sexes"
- all guy groups would be best
- separate groups – too much contradiction between guys and girls
- do separate groups, girls separate from the boys
- girls may not feel comfortable talking about it in front of the guys especially when they're young

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Other

- can't get the information out to guys because they won't report cases
- if parents are beating them up then they learn to bring that to a relationship – "can't teach an old dog new tricks"
- seeing divorced parents trashing each other from a young age isn't good

- relationships are really, really tough - you have to face the truth sometime that love isn't easy
- if their father is like that it's just 2nd nature
- if a husband is abusive it will injure your kids too
- have to have respect for each other or you're doomed from the get-go
- most important thing to teach about would be the starting signs so you can get out; it's not your fault if it happens; who you can go to for help